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California Polytechnic State University

May 22, 2002

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recognized Anthropologist To Speak On Discovery of Million-Year-Old Pre-Human Fossil

The anthropologist whose discovery of a pre-human fossil in Ethiopia earlier this year attracted worldwide media attention and helped put a different spin on the theory of human evolution will discuss his findings at Cal Poly June 3.

William Henry Gilbert, who attended Cal Poly from 1988 to 1992 and is now affiliated with the Laboratory for Human Evolutionary Studies at UC Berkeley, will talk on "Finding African Homo erectus: Paleoanthropological Fieldwork in Ethiopia" at 7 p.m. in Philips Hall in the Christopher Cohan Center.

Gilbert's discovery of a million-year-old skull, which helped confirm the theory that modern man evolved from a single pre-human species, captured national media attention in March.

Scientists say the finding helps prove that Homo erectus originated in Africa and remained there for hundreds of thousands of years, while some members of the species migrated throughout much of the world.

Gilbert was part of a team of scientists led by Tim White, UC Berkeley anthropologist and co-director of the school's Laboratory for Human Evolutionary Studies. The team's findings, published in the March 21 issue of the journal Nature, were significant in determining similarities among fossils also found in Asia and in Europe. Before Gilbert's discovery, scientists believed that several pre-human species existed.

"There's been a recent tendency to give a different name to each of the fossils that comes out of the ground," said White, "and that has led to what we think is a very misleading portrayal of the biology of human evolution. But when you find a fossil like this one so similar to Asian and European ones, it indicates the same species."

Unlike earlier pre-human species with apelike traits, Homo erectus had a large brain, walked upright, made stone tools and ate meat.

Some scientists, while calling the discovery important, still say it does not resolve the debate about separate species.

Gilbert came to Cal Poly as an agricultural engineering major and switched to social sciences after discovering he had an interest in human evolution. He earned a bachelor's degree in anthropology from UC Santa Barbara and is completing work on his doctorate at Berkeley. For more information on Gilbert and his anthropological studies, visit the Web at <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2002/03/daka.html>.

For more information on the free public talk, call Cal Poly's Social Sciences Department at 756-2260.

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